DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 357 159 CE 063 099

AUTHOR Jones, Hywel Ceri
TITLE Qualifications in a Learning Society.
PUB DATE 23 Sep 92
NOTE 14p.; Keynote address presented at the United Kingdom Presidency Conference, "Skills for Europe--1993 and Beyond" (London, England, United Kingdom, September 23, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Continuing Education; *Educational Needs; *Education Work Relationship; Employment Problems; Foreign Countries; *Futures (of Society); *Job Training; *Lifelong Learning; Postsecondary Education; Unemployment; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *Europe

ABSTRACT

It is necessary to raise the standards of the education and training response and to demonstrate that European cooperation in education and training can give practical added value to help individuals both to learn and to use their knowledge and experience as part of their personal and professional development wherever they may be in the Economic Community. Of greatest strategic importance is lifelong learning to the individual and to society as a whole; it is urgent that a lifelong learning system be developed in a Europe-wide context. At present, the European education and training systems are not providing large numbers of young people the minimum competencies and qualifications needed to enable them to get into the labor force. The training systems are not fast enough in their response to new skills needs resulting from technological change and sharpening economic competition; social policies tend to remain in a passive "income maintenance" posture that leads to long-term unemployment and dependence on state support. The more positive results of the ad hoc training measures attempted in the 1970s and 1980s must now be incorporated into an organized postcompulsory education and training system. Qualifications derived from education will be increasingly necessary, and more efforts are needed to attract women and girls to enter higher-paid occupations that require longer and higher levels of training. In addition, there needs to be a marked shift of emphasis throughout Europe to put a new high premium on continuing education and training for the adult work force, with a new commitment to providing recurrent opportunities, flexibility, varied access, and mobility. Lifelong education is needed, with flexibility for different types of education at different life stages. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED357159

QUALIFICATIONS IN A LEARNING SOCIETY

Keynote address by Mr. Hywel Ceri Jones

Director

Task Force Human Resources,
Education, Training and Youth

Commission of the European Communities

at the

United Kingdom Presidency Conference

SKILLS FOR EUROPE - 1993 AND BEYOND

London

23 September 1992

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L Gouveas

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 063099

Secretary of State, Ladies and Gentlemen,

QUALIFICATIONS IN A LEARNING SOCIETY

Introduction

The Commission is very pleased to have been closely associated with the UK Presidency in the organisation of this special European Conference - the first in the series you are organising. The theme of our Conference raises central issues about all our futures in Europe because individuals in today's fast-moving societies are more and more dependent on their recognized learning achievements. The greater the uncertainties we face, the greater the importance of the issues we are addressing in this conference (whatever the shape of Europe may be), since it will only be through the most intelligent investment of our talents and energies that we will be able to tackle the problems we all face in securing solid growth and the conditions for a cohesive and generous society in Europe.

It was to stimulate such a wide ranging debate about future strategy that the Commission issued in January this year 2 linked Memoranda (or Green Papers) on Higher Education and Vocational Training for the 1990s designed to clarify the agenda for developing better education and training systems for the future. We need to raise the standards of the education and training response, and demonstrate that European cooperation in education and training can give a practical added value to help individuals both to learn and to use their knowledge and experience as part of their personal and professional development wherever they may be in a frontier-free Community.

In my contribution today, my aim is to focus on the strategic importance of lifelong learning to the individual and society as a whole, and to underline the urgency with which we need to give attention to the design of a life-long learning system to be developed in a European-wide context.

I assume that most of us here are already persuaded that education and training provide the key to the life chances of every citizen. They will to a considerable extent determine the vitality and competitiveness of the individual Member States and of the Community as a whole in relation to our geo-political competitors, most notably the United States, Japan and South East Asia.

We may hope that all our economic efforts and the completion of the Internal Market will bring higher growth and thereby make life easier, but even in that eventuality the problems arising from the severe skills mismatch we have in Europe will not disappear, for at least three reasons :

- the European education and training systems are clearly not providing large numbers of young people the minimum competencies and qualifications needed to enable them to get into the labour-force - this is the direct route to social exclusion. School-failure and drop-out is a problem of major common concern to all Member States. Let us not forget that in the EC as a whole we have over 14 million unemployed, of whom around 4-1/2 million are young people under the age of 25.

- the training systems are not <u>fast</u> enough in their response to new skills needs resulting from technological change and sharpening economic competition, and the obstacles to access to quality training especially for the large majority who work in SMEs are still too great.

- social policies - especially those aimed at the unemployed - tend to remain in a <u>passive</u> "income maintenance" posture, despite the fact that loss of skill in adult life is now the main threat to personal social security, which leads directly into long-term unemployment and dependence on state income support.

The nations of Europe, with all their political and cultural diversity, have long recognised that their future is dependent on the skills, ingenuity, inventiveness and creativity of people. Industrialisation and the growth of education have gone hand-in-hand. Yet we all now share grave doubts about our competitive edge. Are we developing and using our potential human capital to the extent that we could and should?

In analysing these questions, economic theory, industrial practice and even political events have all been coming to our aid. Over the last 3 or 4 years we have witnessed a growing consensus throughout the European Community, as in other parts of the world, that so-called "intangible capital" is the most vital resource of advanced economies, without which the natural endowments of nations, their financial power and fixed capital will become dwindling resources. This is not only a question of acquiring new skills and knowledge, but also of the capacity to organise and innovate, today expressed in the complex networks of information and alliances, through which nations and firms cooperate.

We have seen too that the potential rewards of the radical new information and communications technologies cannot be reaped without a whole range of new skills and organisational innovations and without a socio-economic process which facilitates their widespread diffusion. This seems to explain the "productivity paradox", namely that massive investment in new technologies is not yet leading to the productivity gains that were to be expected. Without sufficient investment in the "intangible capital" and the infrastructures needed to develop it - of which education, training and R & D are a central part - the economic returns are slow to come. And without European progress on this front some of the economic opportunities of the Single Market will be irretrievably lost. That is why some of the major Community programmes, particular as COMETT (forging university-industry partnerships transnationally), FORCE (Continuing training in firms) and

EUROTECNET (exploring the impact of technological change on training and qualification structures), complementing the Community's R & D effort, put so much importance on the dissemination of experience and good practice.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

Over the past 15 years, by far the dominant question of common concern in Europe has been the initial vocational training of young people.

The first reaction to the high unemployment of the 1970s and 80s in Europe was to strengthen the vocational elements in secondary education. Youngsters and their families voted with their feet, often encouraged by politicians and industrialists and are generally staying longer in some form of education to equip themselves with a viable labour market qualification. Today, the wind is changing back towards the idea that the role of the school is to provide children with the basic competences and attitudes on which broad-based qualifications can subsequently be built, - the foundation laid for later training and retraining for employment, to some extent, by and in firms, as well for non-vocational adult education.

The main landmark in this area is the drive, which the Commission is seeking to mobilise through the PETRA programme, towards achieving in Europe a society in which there are genuine vocational training opportunities for <u>all</u> young people, opportunities which lead to a recognised and worthwhile vocational qualification, and which avoid the deadends of so many of the ad hoc training initiatives invented in the 1970s and 1980s which have failed - <u>and still fail</u> - to engage the motivation and participation of so many of the least qualified young people.

Three points in particular stand out:

- the more positive results of the ad hoc training measures set up in the 1970s and 1980s must now be incorporated into an organised post-compulsory education and training system, in which initial training, between the ages of 16 and say 21, is seen as a key, pivotal stage between compulsory schooling and continuing education and training at adult level;

- secondly, the more emphasis we put on the entitlement of young people to vocational training, and on their right to training of a certain quality, the more emphasis we also inevitably place on qualifications, because they are the means of controlling and certifying the quality and duration of the training. The consequence is that we appear to be moving inexorably towards a qualifications-based society, where it will be increasingly difficult to get a decent job without having obtained at least some form of respectable qualification. We may like this, or not. But it seems to be a strong trend, which is the logical consequence of wanting to improve the quality of the workforce;

- throughout Europe the opportunity must be grasped to encourage more girls and young women to enter high value-added occupations, which need longer and higher levels of training. There is need for clear leadership, and concerted action, because no part of the system can achieve success on its own - schools, careers services, and employers are equally unable to achieve the desired goal independently. Most important of all, there must be locally-coordinated action. The countries which succeed in enabling women to fulfil their potential are going to have an important advantage when it comes to coping with the skills shortages which changes in the labour market will surely lead to during the 1990s.

If we want a well-qualified workforce, we have got to tackle these issues. To get it right, structures may be as important as good marketing. For a new successful system to be developed, European experience suggests that we need to ensure:

- clear possibilities for the individual to progress, from vocational and technical studies, into higher education;

- continuity between initial and adult training, through credit transfer and accumulation, on the lines that, for example, the Scots have developed;

- greater parity of treatment between students in technical training courses and those in education or academic ones. The United Kingdom is by no means alone in seeking to change an anti-technical, anti-vocational culture. The problem, as ever, is to break the link between quality and exclusiveness. Finding ways to define, and then project into the public consciousness, different kinds of quality, appropriate to a scientific and technological society, is still one of the major challenges to be faced in the 1990s.

The extent to which there is now a convergence between the views of educators and the views of the employers and trade unions - at least those of their representatives who meet with us round the table in Brussels - about the purposes, for instance, of compulsory schooling, would surely seem remarkable to our predecessors in education of a generation ago, when cynical educationists, in my experience, were accustomed to say that there were only two qualities which employers expected the school-system to develop in their pupils, and they were punctuality and obedience. When last year the employers group in Brussels produced for the Commission a list of the skills which young people should acquire in compulsory schooling, and should develop more fully in vocational training, the list they came up with included :

"Commitment to quality; ability to communicate effectively, knowledge of one or more foreign languages; the desire to use and develop technologies; a general grasp of the importance of the economic environment in which firms function; problem solving capacity; willingness to adapt to change; ability to work in a team and to relate to others; and an understanding of economics and of the labour market".

There is much encouraging evidence in Europe of the opening up of the processes and purposes of education both to discussion and to active participation and support from outside. Nevertheless, in many parts of Europe, the school is still the only place where learning is seen to be appropriately carried out, and there are still many who believe that it is entirely the responsibility of the State to see to it that children learn and are prepared for entry to work and society.

But we know that school has no monopoly of the learning process; it starts at home, it takes place through play, leisure activities and experiences of all kinds, as well as in school, and it goes on, hopefully, throughout life. These days it could be argued that the most successful schools are those which have actively encouraged teachers to rethink the traditional frontier between what it is appropriate to learn in school and what should be learned outside the school, whether through work-shadowing, work experience, field studies, a training placement in another country, or off the video screen.

TOWARDS LIFE-LONG LEARNING

In your presentation this morning you made it clear, Secretary of State, that the response to the challenges we face involves the engagement of everybody and all levels of education and training systems in a life-long learning process. I would like to put this challenge in historical perspective, because

I believe it to be fundamental for all the European partners.

In the 1960s, when the policy links between the economy and education were first forged through the idea of education as an "investment", targets were most frequently expressed through "social demand", the rationale being that there was a virtuous circle between educational expansion, the growth of the economy and equality of educational opportunity. The collapse of economic growth in the early 1980s led not only to a massive public expenditure constraint, but also to the criticism that educational growth had been "quantitative", supplying education within an unsuitable mould and therefore unhelpful to the growing problem of unemployment.

The great debate about the "quality of education", which rose to the top of the agenda in the United States but quickly spread to Europe, was thus directed towards the supply side of education and the development of "standards" on the basis of which educational performance, both of individuals and schools, could be assessed. Whilst the debate on the quality of education was initiated during a period of slow economic growth in the post oil-shock period, it matured at the time of economic recovery in the early 1980s. In this better economic environment, education was once again seen as a vital instrument for advanced economies, now in the form of "education for all", because the least educated have become the unemployed and the socially excluded.

In the early 1990's another turning point has now been reached. Whilst "education for all" is not challenged as an objective, the priority given to education in public policy is now seen as the basis of a "qualifications for all" policy objective. The notion of a skills "gap" as the critical challenge was clearly enunciated in President Bush's Education 2000 campaign, and equally in a wide range of reports emerging from the European Community, the Member States and the social partners. Business leaders have begun to talk of a "qualifications society". The European Round Table of Industrialists, for example, has made a plea for

education and training to be considered as one of the main pillars of the future development of the European Community; and the European social partners - employers and trade unions - have placed the question of skill and qualification needs as one of the highest priorities on the agenda of the social dialogue at European level.

From the side of the economy, the reasons for this shift in mood and focus are fairly clear. In the global, open markets of today - stimulated undoubtedly by the 1993 single European Market dynamic - "human resources" and "intangible capital" are seen as giving the competitive edge to both enterprises, nations and regional groupings. The obsolescence of human capital has become a strategic issue; too much talent is not being tapped.

For Europe, as for Japan and other countries with limited physical resources, the competition to succeed in the development of human capital is the key to economic success. This is particularly true because of the effects of the demographic changes taking place throughout Europe and has stimulated a marked shift of emphasis in all Member States to put a new high premium on continuing education and training for the adult workforce, with a new commitment to providing recurrent opportunities, flexibility, varied access, and mobility.

The world we are leaving was one in which initial access to education and training determined life-time opportunities and social position. Now we know that the initial investment in qualifications and skills no longer lasts over the life-cycle. Moreover, many people never get into the cycle of opportunities because of lack of initial qualifications, whereas others fall out of the system because their skills became obsolete not least because of the increasing rapidity of company and industrial restructuring. This is the inexorable economic logic which makes it necessary for individuals, enterprises and society to invest in a continuing process of re-training of the working population.

The working of an education and training system is the result of a complex pattern of decisions by individuals. The logic of the "system" is that it enables individuals to pass from childhood and youth up to adulthood through a process of individual development. A "qualification" has the special characteristic of belonging to an individual - it is the formal expression of her or his "competences". It underwrites (though is not the same as) skills - but is only operational in the system which validates it. This is what gives it value to the individual, for although it does not carry with it a guarantee, it does provide recognition by potential employers, and in the modern economy that is the springboard for socio-economic success.

The end-result of these trends is three-fold (and here again I echo some of the key points made by the Secretary of State) :

- a growing interest in formulating "target outcomes for education and training", which represent acceptable public goals and are meaningful to the many individuals and institutions involved ;

- the formulation of such targets in such a way as to allow all the actors to decide on their <u>own</u> means of attaining them though with an increasing commitment to partnership ;

- the use of qualifications as the basis for such targets, given their real operational value for individuals, enterprises, education and training institutions and public authorities.

Life-Long Education and Training

The key point about the concept of life-long education is that it focuses on the individual and her or his opportunities over the whole life-cycle. Its virtue is that it could provide a new vision and a better framework for welding together in one integrated approach the various components of education and training efforts in modern societies at the transition between the 20th and 21st Centuries. This would make economic, social and cultural sense. It could provide a new collective sense of purpose in society, for it implies an extension of individual freedoms and opportunities. One of the central values of Europe, is that, in the balance between the individual and society, Europeans attach high priority to individual freedom. Access to education and training over the life-cycle means more mastery over time, and opportunities to break out of the rigid education-work-retirement sequence in which we are still trapped.

The great strength of our shared European culture and diversity is that we also attach importance to the need for the education systems to prepare young people for a life of active citizenship in our plural societies, giving them a new sense of purpose and basis for active participation. A lifelong strategy of learning cannot and must not be simply equated with the idea of human capital for productivity. Striking the balance between the cultural and economic goals of education and training is one of the main challenges of the 1990s.

The "life cycle" as the key to a new systemic approach

However compelling the need for a life-long approach to education and training, the problems of organising education and training as a coherent system are frightening, especially since many government departments are involved, let alone the social partners, the voluntary sector as well as the education

and training providers and individuals. But we can take heart if we realise that a systemic approach does not mean a single, monolithic system managed from the top. What it really means is a coherent set of opportunities for individuals, to be flexibly available at different points in their lives. The logic for individuals is not that of the "system" but of their own lives. The framework needs to be much clearer so that the various actors -- individuals, families, enterprises and education and training providers may play their role, on the basis of an explicit partnership relationship or coalition between them, bringing all their efforts and resources into the total edifice. Indeed, this is the only approach through which the difficult financing problems involved can be solved so as to move forward practically in this direction.

CONCLUSION

The message I have tried to give this morning is that only if we focus on the realities of the life cycle of our European citizens and workers can we make sense of the variety of policies and programmes, bringing into greater synergy the massive public and private resources, that are now being developed. The rich diversity of experience of the policy makers and practitioners present here in this conference should guarantee the high quality of our discussions. I look forward to participating and to hearing the different viewpoints especially on the idea of target-setting - am sure that they will contribute to our preparations for the next stage of discussions at Community level and to further progress in building better training systems throughout the Community.